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ABSTRACT

The three articles in this newsletter focus on ideas, programs, activities, and research concerned with reading in the content areas. The individual articles contain a discussion of the general approaches that characterize many successful content area reading programs, suggestions for educators who are considering establishing such programs in their schools, and a report of an interview with a tenth-grade biology teacher about the content area reading program at his school. The newsletter also contains reviews of recent publications dealing with the subject. (FL)

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REPORTING ON

READING

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RIGHT TO READ

THIS ISSUE:

READING IN THE CONTENT AREAS

BRIEFLY...

IS THERE ANY STARCH left in that old saw, "Every teacher a teacher of reading?" Perhaps the words have outlived their usefulness, but the idea is very much alive.

This issue of *Reporting on Reading* focuses on the variety of ideas, programs, activities, and research clustered around the phrase "reading in the content areas."

CONTENT-AREA READING HANDLED WITH CARE

"Frankly, many of the content teachers I see are turned-off when it comes to reading. They say flat-out, 'I'm not a reading teacher. That's somebody else's job.'"

That was said by a reading specialist who tried to develop a content-area reading program in the secondary school where she is working. Eventually she gave up. Now she doesn't bother the subject teachers, and, except for an occasional note asking her to test someone for remedial instruction, they don't bother her. "I still have a free morning once a week when I can go into classrooms to observe and give teachers some ideas on how they might weave reading skills into their teaching," she said. But the visits are by invitation only. And very few teachers ask.

Elsewhere, content-area reading programs and activities have met with considerably more success. While each program that seems to be working differs in detail, there are a few general approaches that characterize many of them.

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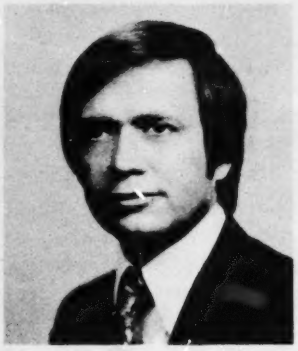
GUEST FEATURE:

PREFACE TO A CONTENT-AREA READING PROGRAM



Harold L. Herber

Harold L. Herber, guest contributor to this issue, is professor of education and director of the Center for the Study of Communication in Content Areas at Syracuse University.

Educators are increasingly turning to teaching reading in content areas as an instructional approach to reading improvement, particularly at middle, junior, and senior high school levels. Many factors prompt this interest: too many students seem deficient in their ability to interpret the resource materials required in their subjects; school personnel are increasingly sensitive to this deficiency; teaching students how to read in the setting in which they are required to read makes very good sense; separate instruction in reading classes reaches relatively few students and seems to have little influence on how well they read in their subjects.

Before a school district embraces a content-area approach to reading improvement, its personnel should

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THE VIEW FROM INSIDE

Reading a sophisticated description of how content area reading skills are introduced to classroom teachers sometimes leaves the unintended impression that content teachers are an unwary prey, soon to be swallowed up by forces over which they have little control. Whether this is true or not, the content teacher's point of view about the significance of introducing reading skills into his or her own teaching tends to get lost when program strategies are discussed.

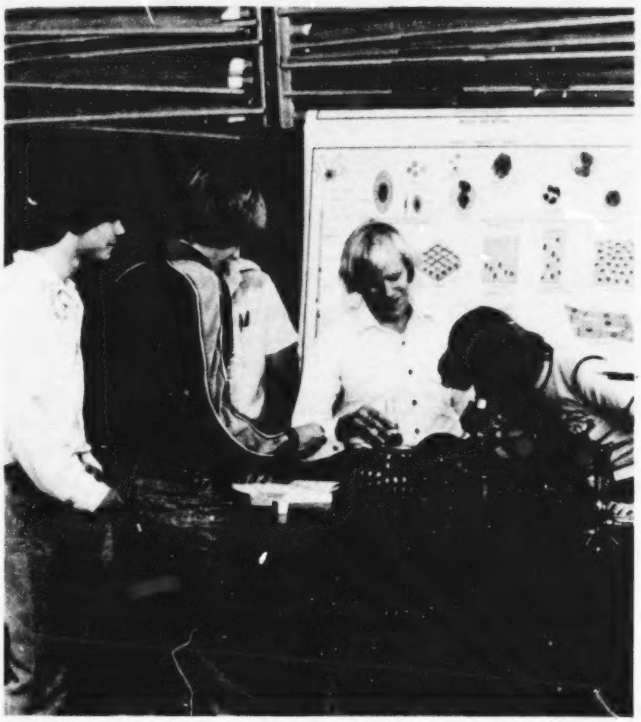
For a closer look at how one subject-area teacher views the content-reading program in his school, *Reporting on Reading* staff interviewed Paul Budd, a tenth-grade biology teacher at Oak Grove Lutheran High School in Fargo, North Dakota. The content-reading program at Oak Grove is two years old and is directed by Barbara Livdahl.

Q You're a biology teacher, right? You probably never took a course in reading when you were in college. How, then, can you be expected to teach reading?

Paul Budd: I don't teach reading, at least not in the usual sense of sitting down with a reading book and teaching what's in it. That's not my job. My job is to teach biology. But in teaching biology, students have to read; they have to understand. My job is to make sure that they can grasp the materials they have to read. If you want to call what I need to do to succeed at teaching "reading," then O.K., I teach reading.

Q Your inservice workshops in content reading–what sticks in your mind about them?

Budd: They all gave me something I could use in my teaching. They suggested things to do, things to try. Of course, I had already been doing some of the things that were mentioned, but that helped too because I could say, "Hey, I must have been doing a pretty good job." But the important thing, I think, is that if you give teachers practical things to do, they'll do them.



"My job is to teach biology. But in teaching biology, students have to read; they have to understand."

Q Specifically, what are a few of the things you do now that you didn't before?

Budd: The way I give assignments has changed quite a bit. I don't just say, "Read Chapter 1 or pages such-and-such." Instead, I might say, "Read page 265 and find out what 'fusion' means." I give my students something specific and something small enough so that they'll try to do it.

Another thing is that I now look at textbooks more analytically. Of course, I look for a book that teaches what I feel is important for a tenth grader to know about biology, but I also look for a book that's readable and has a text that can help students learn. Chapter overviews, performance goals for each chapter, questions placed at the end of sections instead of being lumped at the end, and some analytical questions that go beyond the materials given I now see as extremely useful things to look for in a biology text.

Q How have your students responded to what you've been doing?

Budd: I don't like to see kids fail. And I don't think they need to fail. I'm convinced that techniques like being specific and giving assignments a bit at a time will work with most students. I'm not claiming 100 percent success, but by using content-reading techniques, I've had a lot of success with students who have not done things before and who now all of a sudden are starting to try.□

Reporting on Reading is a publication of the National Right to Read Effort. It is designed to present information on innovative and developmental reading projects and activities to teachers, administrators, and others who work with preschool, elementary, secondary, and adult populations.

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Inquiries or requests for additional information may be sent to Paul Owoc, editor, *Reporting on Reading*, CEMREL, Inc., 3120 59th Street, St. Louis, Missouri 63139.

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consider what is involved. They should determine what "teaching reading in content areas" really means (there are different interpretations), how such a program is created, what pitfalls need to be avoided, what such a program accomplishes.

What Is Reading in Content Areas?

Reading is taught in content areas when subject-area teachers teach their students how to read what they are required to read as they read it. The instruction is provided by regular classroom teachers within regular subject-area classes as a natural part of the curriculum. This assures the simultaneous learning of course content and reading process, with neither being sacrificed to the other.

Creating the Program

Two factors–among many–emerge as essential in the creation of such programs: (1) Treating reading as a unified process; and (2) Developing a long-term commitment to staff development.

Reading as a unified process: The reading that is taught in content areas is that which is needed to read the materials of the subject. Reading is not taught apart from the materials being read. Rather than breaking up reading into a set of separate skills, reading skills and subject content are "kept whole," and students are shown how to use the language of the various subjects to understand the concepts which comprise those subjects. When reading is taught in this way, the same processes are reinforced in the different subject areas. For example, students acquire and learn to apply the technical languages (vocabulary) of the various subjects. Their comprehension of written materials in the various disciplines improves because in each they are taught to identify essential information; to develop ideas by perceiving relationships in that information; to relate those ideas to their own prior knowledge and related experience. There are other features of this unified process that are similarly applicable within and across various subject areas. Sources listed in the bibliography contain useful explanations and applications.

Staff development: Teaching reading in content areas as a unified process is deceptively simple. When teachers study it carefully and practice it consistently, students' achievement in both reading and course content is positively affected. Such staff development takes time: for study, for assimilation, for practice, for reinforcement, for adaptation. And this requires a long-term commitment to improvement of instruction. There is no short cut. A classic example of the success that comes from such a commitment is the excellent program that has been developed over the past five years in School District No. 11, The Bronx, New York. Small groups of teachers who volunteer meet regularly in workshops to study and practice instructional strategies. Subsequently, they work with other interested teachers to share what they are learning about teaching reading in content areas.

Possible Pitfalls

What should be avoided while developing a program for teaching reading in content areas? Anything that imposes on content teachers the philosophy or methods or materials which characterize the direct reading instruction that occurs in most reading classes.

Because of the growing awareness of the importance of teaching reading in content areas, an increasing number of programs are being made available to school districts. Before adopting any program for or approach to reading instruction in content areas, school personnel should examine it by raising four important questions: (1) Will the program separate instruction in reading from instruction in required course content in any way? (2) Will the materials normally used for teaching the course content be replaced in any way? (3) Will the instruction be provided in any location other than in the regular subject-area classroom? (4) Will anyone other than the content-area teacher provide that instruction? An affirmative answer to any of these questions signals a critical pitfall: the abandonment of instruction in the content of a subject in favor of instruction in reading. Such approaches to teaching reading in content areas are almost always rejected by subject-area teachers and, thus, are doomed to fail even before they begin.

"Reading is taught in content areas when subject-area teachers teach their students what they are required to read as they read it. The instruction is provided by regular classroom teachers within regular subject-area classes as a natural part of the curriculum."

High on the list of things to avoid in program development is the use of the cliché "Every teacher a teacher of reading." This statement and related mandates ("All teachers will teach reading in their subjects starting next September!") serve only to reinforce content teachers' fears of having to substitute reading instruction for content instruction in their courses.

Promising Futures

Within the approach to reading improvement defined at the beginning of this article lies the potential for meeting the reading needs of most of our students. Heretofore, school personnel have spent most of their time and money on teaching reading to relatively few students in separate

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reading classes, with most students not ever receiving instruction in how to read the required materials in their subjects. Where school districts commit themselves to the necessary staff development, where teachers learn to teach reading and course content simultaneously, and where reading personnel serve content teachers as resource people, the need for separate reading classes is drastically reduced to serve only those students who need extra help because of severe problems. The reading needs of most students are met by instruction in the regular classroom.

Such a program is not developed easily, but the product is clearly worth the effort. As you lay your own plans, be sure to apply the text questions listed earlier in this article. They will keep you on target and help you develop a program truly beneficial to your students.□

Q Dr. Herber, as you point out in your article, secondary school teachers have been the traditional audience for content-reading programs. Why have elementary teachers, who also have to be concerned with content teaching, received so little attention?

Harold Herber: Well, one reason is that for a long time teachers and professional people in reading assumed that since reading as a subject was already being taught in elementary school, there was no need to teach reading skills in any of the other subjects. It was logical, therefore, not to emphasize reading instruction in content areas at either level. This attitude can cause a problem, I think. The belief that students will transfer the skills they learn in reading to their other subjects hasn't proven to be valid. Students don't make the transfer automatically. They need reading instruction in their other subjects as well.

A related issue is that for a long time elementary teachers, like secondary teachers, weren't sure how to go about teaching reading in the content areas, nor did they feel they would have enough time to teach content and reading too. Attitudes are beginning to change now as teachers are becoming more aware of what content-area reading instruction is all about. As I visit schools, I can see an increasing interest in teaching reading in content areas on the part of elementary school teachers. People responsible for organizing and administering programs also are beginning to feel that elementary teachers need to become involved. These trends, I think, will continue.

Q Can a good content-area program replace the need for special instruction in reading for those students who have severe reading problems?

Herber: No, I don't think so. But I need to qualify my answer. I see the basic reading program in secondary schools as reading instruction as it occurs in content-area classes. Instruction in separate reading classes would be supplemental. When content teachers see students in their classes whose needs in reading go beyond the instruction they are already receiving, at that point supplemental instruction should be considered. But regardless of the kind of supplemental instruction provided, it's important not to see that instruction as supplanting or being a substitute for the main effort of a schoolwide reading program-reading in regular classrooms provided by content teachers.

Q Many of the newer textbooks are organized far more carefully than they were even a few years ago. If such texts are adopted, is there less need for teachers to use special approaches to help students understand what they are reading?

Herber: I'm encouraged by some of the things being done in some of the newer textbooks. Just simple things like placing the vocabulary at the beginning of the chapter rather than at the end or giving students and overview of what they will be reading can make quite a difference. But I think no matter how well texts are organized or how many aids for the student are embedded in them, they still require a teacher who knows how to use those devices to teach the reading and reasoning skills students need to learn. Just because a book is well designed doesn't mean that a teacher can simply assign it and then expect students to use it and learn from it by themselves.

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Content teachers meet to consider the match between the texts they are using and the reading ability of their students. (Courtesy of St. Paul (Minnesota) Public Schools)

CONTENT-AREA (continued from page 1)

Phonics Phobia

To a reading teacher, the word "reading" means much more than teaching phonics. To those not standing so close, though, phonics teaching and reading may seem tightly linked. Some educators have observed that if a successful content-area reading program is to be established, the view of reading as a subject concerned only with phonics teaching must first be changed.

Speaking at a recent convention, Dorothy Dietrich, reading specialist with the Uniondale (New York) Public Schools, explained: "One of the things we emphasized most was that we did not expect secondary teachers to get involved in the teaching of phonics. As soon as they heard us discussing reading improvement, they felt we expected them to teach consonants, vowel sounds, blends, etc. When we assured them that this was not the case, some of the apprehension that they had began to disappear."

Purpose of Content-Area Reading

If content-area reading is not meant to teach phonics, what is it supposed to do? Many educators feel that the success or failure of a content-area reading program hinges on how well the purposes of the program are described to content teachers. Unless those purposes are understood and accepted, content teachers may think of reading as an unwelcome addition to an already tight teaching schedule. And the reading teacher who thought up the idea to begin with may be seen as a person bent on having a lighter teaching load and less instructional responsibility.

What are the legitimate purposes of content-area reading teaching?

Dwight Granquenett, reading consultant for the Lincoln (Nebraska) Public Schools, feels there are only two: "to give teachers better, sharper tools to accomplish their own subject-matter objectives and to give students a better chance to learn the content skills a teacher feels they need to master." Both objectives are similar. Rather than emphasize reading skills as ends in themselves, the objectives talk instead of helping a subject-matter teacher become even better at his or her own specialty.

Cloze in the Closet

"Many times I find that content teachers are already teaching important reading skills without ever thinking of them or labeling them specifically as reading skills," Betty Allen, director of Progress Through Reading Improvement, Monroeville, Alabama, explains. "I mention notetaking, using the index or glossary of a book, or introducing vocabulary, and a large number of content teachers will say, 'Oh, I'm doing that, but I didn't realize that's what you meant when you said teaching reading skills.'"

Introducing content teachers to reading skills by using techniques already familiar to them has considerable value, according to Edith Slinger, director of the Title IV-C program in Junction City, Oregon. "Begin with something you know teachers are already doing or think is important to do," she says. "That way you avoid implicity saying to teachers, 'Throw away everything you've been doing. Let me show you how to really teach reading.'"

Getting teachers to realize that teaching content reading is not different from what they may already have been doing is an important part of many reading efforts. Reading specialists frequently talk about the necessity of stripping away some of the mystique from teaching reading if content teachers are to become more involved. In some schools, for example, titles like "reading specialist," with its connotation of inaccessible professional expertise, are being replaced with the more neutral "reading coordinator."

The jargon of reading itself may be another deterrent to content-teacher involvement. As convenient and functional as terms like cloze procedure, maze, SQ3R, and SMOG are to reading people, they are not heard in many schools trying to establish content-reading programs. As Dorothy Doyle of the Parkway School District in Chesterfield, Missouri, explains, "We try from the beginning to de-emphasize special terminology that teachers may associate with reading specialists. We feel that we can talk about the ideas behind reading terms without ever needing to mention the terms themselves. Terminology, especially if it's dragged out at the beginning, can put a lot of people off. We try hard to talk in ordinary language."

Great Expectations

Representing content-area reading as a cure-all for any instructional difficulty is not helpful, say a number of reading teachers. If expectations of subject-area teachers are raised all out of proportion, and then teachers find that immediate, noticeable differences in student achievement do not follow, a content-reading program is likely to founder.

It is important to stress right from the start that even the best designed, most carefully executed content-reading program will not necessarily make subject-matter learning easy. "For students to experience difficulty in a content-area reading program is very, very normal," notes Mary McFarland, instructional coordinator of social studies in the Parkway School District, Chesterfield, Missouri. "For example," she continues, "content-area vocabulary is often specialized terminology or ordinary language used in special ways. Content-area reading instruction can't change that, and teachers shouldn't be led to believe that it will."

What a program in content-area reading teaching can do, according to Dr. McFarland, is to help counter a teacher's natural tendency to pull back from presenting

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CONTENT-AREA (continued from page 5)

difficult concepts or assigning challenging reading when students begin to experience difficulty. "Teachers who know something about how to use content-area reading skills are better equipped to present difficult materials more effectively," says Dr. McFarland. "And they're less likely to avoid assigning reading that presents difficult concepts or ideas."

Something Practical

Often content-area reading programs fail to take root because not enough thought is given to linking the reading process discussed at an inservice meeting to the particular materials a subject-area teacher is using. "It doesn't help to give teachers all the theory in the world if you end up saying, 'Now that you know what to do, go to it,'" explains Betty Leonard, reading teacher at Kenai (Alaska) Junior High School. "You've got to take that theory and put it into something more practical-something that will fit what teachers are doing in their individual classes and something that can be put to immediate use in their classrooms the very next day."

Various approaches have been tried to relate content-reading skills to the material a teacher uses. In the Junction City School District, a series of workbooks is being used. Each booklet deals with one reading skill. For example, the booklet on breaking words into meaning units provides instructions on how to take a word apart and a glossary of prefixes, suffixes, and root meanings. To use the booklets, each content teacher then adds the specific vocabulary of his or her own subject.

"What's nice about this approach," comments Mrs. Slinger, "is that while students are mastering vocabulary, their teachers are learning how to teach vocabulary more effectively. Once teachers go through a workbook, they understand the process and can take it from there."

In the Right to Read Program at Woodrow Wilson Junior High School in San Diego, a different approach has been used. After beginning with a week-long workshop meant to saturate content teachers with ideas for improving teaching skills in reading, teachers were paid to prepare materials that would translate workshop theory into classroom practice. Valerie Musso, resource teacher, explains: "We put aside some money and said teachers who wished to might apply for paid writing time to prepare materials for their particular subjects with their particular students." Did teachers write? Indeed, they did. In fact, the packets on creative writing skills and those on dictionary and spelling skills are now being used by many teachers throughout the country.

Teacher Involvement Essential

"My first recommendation for anyone planning to begin a content-reading program is to include subject teachers in the planning and running of the program," Dwight Grandgenett of Lincoln, Nebraska, said when asked what single factor was most likely to lead to a workable program.

Many other reading teachers agree. When subject-matter teachers are involved in deciding what reading skills they would most like to learn, when subject-matter teachers lead workshops and share their good ideas with others, content area reading programs seem credible to other teachers-not just a waste of time. Betty Allen of Monroeville, Alabama explains: "It's simply that teachers can identify more easily with other teachers facing the same problems than they can with me or even with the remarks of an invited speaker, no matter how uplifting either of us may be."

Reflecting similar concerns with content-area inservice programs based mainly on workshops given by invited speakers, the Boulder Valley (Colorado) School District responded by developing a districtwide content-area inservice team. Made up of secondary teachers with subject-matter specialties, elementary teachers, counselors, principals, and special education teachers, the team of some 75 trained people can be divided into any number of specialty subteams suited to the requirements of almost any audience. Barbara Lewis, Right to Read director and leader of the team, mentions an important side benefit of the team approach to content-area inservice: "We have credibility, of course. We learned long ago that classroom teachers listen to other classroom teachers more willingly than they listen to college professors. But just as important, we saw that teachers started asking to visit the inservice team members in their classrooms so that they could actually see the teachers practicing what they talked about. That's follow-up of the finest kind."

Provide Support

Don't ask unless you are willing to give. Asking teachers to make study guides that stress reading skills or to differentiate their teaching according to the reading ability of each student without giving them the time or resources to do it is courting disaster. Decide what kinds of financial and staff support are available before beginning any content-area reading program. Then, many reading specialists suggest, tailor your ambitions to the support you feel certain you can provide.

As with many other programs, efforts in content reading seem to work best when the principal and central-office staff support the program. "Content-area reading is like a lot of other things," says Dwight Grandgenett. "If it is seen as important by important people, then that helps teachers maintain their efforts. I'm not saying that teachers get involved in a content-area reading program just because the principal is interested in it, but that interest does help maintain the effort once it gets going. If you don't have the support, the handholding, the pushing, the badgering, the encouragement to continue the effort, it's very easy to shrug it off."□

RESOURCES

Book Power

To get around thoughts of reading as a passive experience, Carl B. Smith, Sharon L. Smith, and Larry Mikulecky use the word "bookthinking" in their text *Teaching Reading in Secondary School Content Subjects: A Bookthinking Process.* Bookthinking is what happens when a student engages in discourse with a book, with an author. Discourse becomes possible when a student can follow an author's vocabulary and language patterns, analyze the organization of an author's ideas, and is interested enough to want to try. The text emphasizes what content teachers can do to bring books and students together.

Copies available from Holt, Rinehart & Winston, Inc., 383 Madison Avenue, New York, New York 10017; $12.95.

The Shape of a Field

Reading Instruction in the Content Area is the no-nonsense title of a short book of resources developed cooperatively by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills and the Iowa Department of Public Instruction. Like the title, the rest of the book is a tightly-packed collection of resources in content reading that any teacher would be pleased to own. After an introduction that deals briefly with what content reading is, why it is important, and how content teachers can blend reading into their teaching methods, the remainder of the book is a state-of-the-art annotated listing of books, articles, and papers about content-area reading.

Copies available from ERIC Document Reproduction Service, P.O. Box 190, Arlington, Virginia 22210; $2.54; order no. ED 149 303.

Shortcuts to Content Contentment

Before launching a content-area reading program of your own, would you like to know more about how educators in San Mateo, California, Rochester, New York, or Hampton, Virginia went about setting up their programs? Or you may be past the planning stage and anxious to have some specifics on how you can assist teachers of art, business, English, industrial arts and vocational education, foreign languages, health and physical education, mathematics, music, science, or social studies. Whatever your needs or wherever you are in your preparation, you might benefit by having a look at *Teaching Reading in the Secondary School: A Bibliography* by H. L. Narang. This bibliography, current through 1976, lists nearly 300 references.

Copies are available from ERIC Document Reproduction Service, P.O. Box 190, Arlington, Virginia 22210; $2.15; order no. ED 132 524.

Research on Secondary School Reading

"Let all secondary reading specialists be warned! Little research exists to support many of the methods you either use or tout," Patricia L. Anders warns in an article written for the first issue of a new monograph series that reports research related to reading in secondary schools. The theme of monograph #1 is research on reading in the secondary schools; monograph #2 deals with reading comprehension in secondary schools; and monograph #3, available in April, will discuss reading in the content areas.

Copies available from Reading Department, College of Education, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona 85721; $3.50 for each monograph.

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TALKING IT OVER

Grouping Without Exhaustion–Some Solutions

In a previous issue of *Reporting on Reading*, Mrs. Roy G. VanWye, a first-grade teacher, asked whether anyone knew of any studies that deal with the number of reading groups a teacher could manage effectively. Providing instruction to seven, six, or even five groups seemed to her more than was physically possible. Here are some answers from readers.

☐Try an individualized program. Of course, some children will be on the same level, but not everyone will be on the same page. —*Francis Bradac*, Port Orford, Oregon.

☐No teacher should have to deal with seven groups. A system developed by Dr. Ethna Reid, at the Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction, in Salt Lake City, Utah, using only three groups, helps teachers apply organizing and reading techniques that have amazing results. —*Winnette Payne*, reading coordinator, Poudre School District R1, Fort Collins, Colorado.

The implied formality in a daily schedule that calls for Mrs. VanWye to meet with seven groups twice a day boggles the mind. I can see why she feels exhausted in a situation that requires physically more than she can accomplish. Much has been written about the informal classroom and language experience approaches to the teaching of reading. I suggest that she and her principal investigate some of that research. —*Stan Carlson*, consultant, Nebraska Department of Education, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Your questions, comments, answers, or ideas are welcome. Address letters to: Editor, *Reporting on Reading*, CEMREL, Inc., 3120 59th Street, St. Louis, Missouri 63139.

ISSUES TO COME

March	Classroom and school organization for effective reading instruction
April	Teaching reading to adult nonreaders and out-of-school youth
June	Inservice programs for teachers of reading
August	Teaching reading comprehension
September	Reading instruction for the reading disabled: The diagnostic-prescriptive approach

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